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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000229

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA'S MOST INFLUENTIAL SENATORS

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Cheryl Fernandes for reasons  
1.4 (b and d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Nigeria's bicameral legislature has 490 federal legislators, of which a few are more influential than others due to the leadership positions they occupy or their connections to powerful players in Nigerian politics. Some are respected within and outside the chambers because they are regarded as articulate and passionate. Below is our take on the most influential members of the Nigerian Senate, taking into account position, connections and passion. Post will report septel on the House of Representatives. End summary.

12. (C) The Nigerian Senate is comprised of 109 members: three senators from each of the 36 states and one senator representing the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The Nigerian Senate President is elected by the Senate to preside over the affairs of the upper chamber. The current session, inaugurated on June 5, 2007, is the 6th since Nigerian independence in 1960. Of the 109 senators, 83 are first term members. The ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) accounts for more than 2/3 of the members in both houses of the National Assembly; however, party affiliations often change as a result of shifting loyalties and alliances, and a system in which parties have no ideological basis and generally poorly defined political platforms.

13. (SBU) The list below (with state affiliation) is in no particular order, other than Senate President David Mark who, by virtue of his position, is the highest ranking and most influential senator. We also listed Mark in our top 25 most influential people cable in October 2008 (08 Abuja 2095).

14. (C) SENATE PRESIDENT DAVID MARK (PDP, BENUE). As President of the Senate, Mark ranks as the third highest government official behind the President and Vice President, per the Nigerian constitution. No key decision can pass through the Upper Chamber without his input and endorsement. His position earns him a seat at strategic meetings of the Council of State, the PDP Caucus at the National Assembly, and the PDP Board of Trustees and zonal party meetings, where key decisions are made. He owes his Senate seat and presidency to former President Obasanjo, to whom he maintains ties. Mark has strong links with past military leaders like Generals Babangida (1985-93) and Obasanjo (1999-2007), having been part of the military junta that ruled Nigeria prior to the coming of age of civilian rule in 1999. He is believed to have acquired vast wealth during his tenure in government,

particularly as Minister of Communications. He was born in 1948 and has represented Benue South district since 1999.

15. (C) IKE EKWEREMADU (PDP, ENUGU) Ekweremadu is Deputy Senate President and the highest ranking Nigerian official of Igbo descent from the southeast. He chairs the joint committee set up by the National Assembly to amend the Nigerian constitution, and has recently used that position to promote the idea of Senate supremacy over the House of Representatives. Born in 1962, he is a constitutional lawyer who served as Chief of Staff to the Enugu State Governor before coming to the Senate in 2003. He appears to be close to Senate President Mark.

16. (C) JIBRIL AMINU (PDP, ADAMAWA). An academic, former Nigerian Ambassador to the U.S. and former petroleum minister under Babangida from 1989-92, Aminu enjoys widespread influence. Having served under several former heads of state in various capacities, his connections to their political networks make him arguably the most influential senator from the northeast. He is currently Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs. Former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, also from Adamawa State, is one of his main rivals. Aminu was one of the people believed to have helped push Atiku out of the ruling PDP to the Action Congress (AC). Upon Atiku's departure, Aminu saw to the replacement of Atiku's loyalists with his own in the Adamawa PDP leadership. Recently, Aminu also helped ensure that Atiku was politically humiliated in their home state of Adamawa. He assiduously worked toward the overwhelming PDP victory over Atiku's AC in the rerun of the Adamawa gubernatorial election in April

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12008. Born in 1939, Aminu is a cardiologist by training and has taught medicine both in Nigeria and at the University of London. Of his various titles -- Senator, Ambassador, Doctor and Professor -- Aminu prefers Professor, as he says it is the most worthy of respect, if not the most difficult to achieve.

17. (C) IBRAHIM IDA (PDP, KATSINA). Ida is a friend and classmate of President Yar'Adua, with whom he claims to have shared a desk all the way through primary school. He also hails from the same senatorial zone as the President. Ida is known as a primary "Mr. Fix It" for President Yar'Adua in the Senate, although there are other senators who play such a role as well. Though only a first term senator, Ida heads the Senate Committee on Defense, an indication of his political influence. A retired bureaucrat, he has held important positions including serving as Commissioner of Finance in Katsina State and as a Permanent Secretary in the Presidency. He was born in 1949 and travels frequently to Saudi Arabia.

18. (C) VICTOR NDOMA-EGBA (PDP, CROSS RIVER). Ndoma-Egba is the Deputy Senate Leader (akin to Deputy Senate Majority Leader in the U.S.) and holds the highest position of any senator from the south-south. He is close to the governors of Cross River and Akwa Ibom states. A lawyer by training, Egba holds the professional title of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), the highest professional recognition in the legal profession. He was born in 1956 and served as Commissioner for Works and Transport in Cross River State before coming to the Senate in 2003. He chaired the Senate panel which investigated the activities of the Petroleum Trust Development Fund (PTDF), whose report largely exonerated then-President Obasanjo and blamed former VP Atiku Abubakar for irregularities in the management of the PTDF. The report came in the midst of the 2007 election campaign, leading many to deduce that Ndoma-Egba was loyal to the former president who wanted Atiku's presidential aspirations thwarted in favor of Yar'Adua. Ndoma-Egba has a good relationship with the press from having served as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Information and Media (i.e. Senate Spokesman) during his first term.

19. (C) UCHE CHUKWUMERIJE (People's Progressive Alliance

(PPA), ABIA). Federal Minister of Information during the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, Chukwumerije is one of the most articulate voices in the "opposition." He is a respected leader of the Igbo ethnic group who, in 2006, led a group of outspoken legislators in successfully thwarting President Obasanjo's plan to remain in office beyond the constitutional limit of two terms. Having led the opposition to Obasanjo's third-term agenda, he renounced his membership of the ruling PDP on the eve of 2007 elections and switched to the PPA under whose banner he successfully returned to the Senate. He was born in 1939 and first elected into the Senate in 2003. Chukwumerije's son Chika won a bronze medal in taekwondo at the 2008 Olympics, one of Nigeria's only individual medals. The elder Chukwumerije himself holds the rank of senior black belt in the sport.

¶10. (C) GBEMISOLA SARAOKI (PDP, KWARA) One of the youngest senators, Senator Saraki is the younger sister of Kwara State Governor Bukola Saraki who is reputed to be a key member of President Yar'Adua's inner circle and serves as Chairman of the Governors' Forum. She is the daughter of Second Republic Senator Olusola Saraki, the influential power broker of Kwara politics. Known as "Gbemi," she is gradually establishing herself as an up-and-coming politician in the Nigerian Senate. In 2006, she surprised many by teaming up with opponents of Obasanjo's "Third Term Agenda," despite her father's long association with Obasanjo. This move won her many admirers. Last year, Saraki, a second term senator, contested for the senate presidency, though PDP powerbrokers prevailed on her to shelve her ambition and support David Mark. Born in 1956, Saraki has relatively unfettered access to the party establishment, if not the Presidency, through her family.

¶11. (C) ADELEKE OLORUNNIMBE MAMORA (Action Congress (AC), LAGOS). A medical doctor and former Speaker of the Lagos

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State House of Assembly, Mamora is the Deputy Minority Leader and leader of the opposition AC in the Upper Chamber. A good-natured and composed debater, reputed to be a man of principle, Mamora is probably the most respected senator from the Southwest. In 2006, Mamora along with Chukwumerije and other lawmakers played a leading role in frustrating Obasanjo's "Third Term Agenda". Born in 1953, he was first elected in 2003 and reelected in 2007.

¶12. (C) UMARU DAHIRU (PDP, SOKOTO). Dahiru is currently Chairman of the Northern Senators' Forum. He chairs the Senate Committee on Judiciary, Human Rights and Legal Matters. He is well connected to the traditional political elite in the north, a factor which led to his election as Chairman of the Forum, a lobby group set up within Upper Chamber to promote issues of particular interest to the northern constituency. A lawyer by training, Dahiru is an experienced politician who held key positions (i.e. Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice) in Sokoto State before his election to the Senate in 2003. He was born in 1953.

¶13. (C) AHMED MAKARFI (PDP, KADUNA). Makarfi appears to be very influential behind the scenes in the Upper Legislative Chamber. Aside from serving formerly as Governor of the sometimes turbulent state of Kaduna, Makarfi was a serious candidate for the PDP's nomination in the 2007 Presidential election. He later became the northwest coordinator for Yar'Adua's campaign. Perhaps as a reward for his loyalty, Makarfi was given the senatorial nod and, after being elected, appointed to head the Senate Finance Committee. An accountant by training, Makarfi worked as a banker and served as Commissioner of Finance in Kaduna State before joining politics in 1998. He was born in 1956.

¶14. (C) AHMED SANI (All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), ZAMFARA). Sani is the Minority Whip in the Senate. As governor of Zamfara State from 1999 to 2007, he introduced

the Shari'a code there. Sani is also the architect of the often criticized deal between the opposition ANPP and ruling PDP which culminated in the very loosely defined "Government of National Unity", in which a few relatively minor ministerial slots were given to the ANPP by Yar'Adua to gain its support and help undermine General Buhari's lawsuit over the 2007 presidential election. Because of this, Sani supposedly gained favor with President Yar'Adua and other PDP stalwarts.

¶15. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.  
SANDERS